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Education for Brazilian Pupils and Students in Japan: Towards a Multicultural Symbiotic Society

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Abstract

Following the revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 1990 a greater number of ‘newcomers’ have come from Brazil to work for several years in Japan. The growing number of workers from Brazil reflects the growing number of Brazilian pupils and students in public schools. This paper will focus on Japanese education policy and strategies that have been undergoing important changes in order to accept and cope with the increasing cultural diversity in schools and education settings. Further, it will put forward a proposal for how to provide for Brazilian children.

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Keywords: Brazilian pupils and students; Education policy; Japanese as a second language; *Nikkei*; Multicultural symbiotic society

1. Introduction

The number of foreign people in Japan is rapidly growing every year. According to the Immigration Bureau of the Ministry of Justice, there were 2,186,121 registered foreigners in Japan in March 2009. This accounts for 1.71% of the whole population of Japan. The number of foreigners may not seem large compared with other multi-ethnic countries. However, since it had been believed that Japan was composed only of Japanese people, with no ethnic minorities (although we can see this was actually a myth, having had such ethnic minorities as the Ainu People in Hokkaido and Okinawan people in Okinawa), Japan has been struggling with multicultural issues over the past 20 years (Hirasawa 2009, Murphy-Shigematsu 2004).

When we consider multicultural issues, there are two main categories of foreign residents that will be defined as a means of differentiating groups according to historical and political allegiances. One can be categorized as ‘old-comers’, who came to Japan mainly before and during World War II. This category consists of 420,000 people, mainly from Korea and Taiwan. The second group is referred to as ‘newcomers’. They are from Asia and South America. Brazilians, of whom there are about 310,000 in Japan, are the major ethnic group from South America. This is because since 1990, when the Japanese Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act was revised, Japan has been taken in a lot of Japanese people who immigrated to Brazil from the beginning of the 1900s to the 1970s, as well as their children, grandchildren, and other descendants. They are called *Nikkei* Brazilian. The revision of the Act permitted descendants of these immigrants from Japan, up to the third generation, and their families to have long-term resident visas, with which they are authorized to reside in Japan with a length of stay designated by the Minister of Justice. These *Nikkei* people and their families are now categorized as ‘newcomers’.

Looking at the current trend regarding the increase in the number of immigrants from Brazil, this study will focus on the particular educational needs and problems of Brazilian pupils and students. Therefore, in this paper, I will discuss how Japanese education should meet and develop children with cultural diversity. First, I will describe multiculturalism and the current situation, focusing on Brazilians in Japan. Second, the Japanese government’s education policies for foreign children will be addressed from a multicultural perspective. Finally, it will propose a solution for how to provide for foreign children.

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2. Multiculturalism in Japan

Multicultural society and multi-ethnic society are terms widely used to describe our lives. However, although the term ‘multicultural symbiotic society’ is currently often used in Japan, many Japanese people have not yet been made aware of the term and its meaning. Multicultural symbiotic society is defined as a society where people who have different nationalities or ethnicities live together as a members of local communities, recognizing their cultural differences, and attempting to build equal relationships (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2006).

Before the term multicultural symbiotic society gained popularity, the term ‘international exchange’ was often used at public and private events (and sometimes still is). It basically describes the situation from the host country’s point of view; it is valuable for Japan to have guests from foreign countries, and offer them a good time in Japan, which will give them a better image of Japan, and may lead to a good relationship between Japan and their countries in the future. It obviously emphasizes host and guest relations rather than mutual understanding.

International exchange is a concept more understandable and welcome for most Japanese. This is because they still believe that Japan is very unique country which is just for native Japanese people, not for ethnic minorities. Moreover, there is still a strong tendency for Japanese people to have a kind of admiring attitude toward some countries, especially North American and European countries, and some prejudice toward other countries. Therefore, they do not try to see foreign residents in their own communities as neighbours, or partners to develop a multicultural symbiotic society. When we consider why the government needed to define the term multicultural symbiotic society, we see how important it is to raise their consciousness of the reality, which is that Japan needs to wake up and deal with many issues related to foreign residents, from government to their own local communities.

Indeed, there are differences in the degree of enthusiasm toward each ethnic group among Japanese. Looking at Brazilians as foreign residents, for example, some stereotyped characteristics attributed to them become obstacles to understanding each other, which leads to misunderstanding between Brazilians and Japanese. These stereotypes also negatively influence the treatment of Brazilian children in schools. In the next section, I shall explain the current situation of Brazilian residents and their children before arguing for changes to education for Brazilian children.

2.1 Brazilian residents and their children

In this section, I will describe the background of the *Nikkei* Brazilian people in Japan along with their current working situation. Then, I will highlight the issues facing Brazilian children and their schooling situation.

2.1.1 Background of the increased number of Brazilians in Japan

Most *Nikkei* Brazilian residents who came to Japan used to be called *dekasegi*, a term describing workers who spend several years in another country to send their earnings home or save them for a future business in Brazil. As it has been explained above, their numbers rapidly grew after the revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 1990. There are also some social and economical factors that explain why they came to Japan. Terashima and Kawada (2003) point out two main factors. One is that they were struggling with a sluggish economy and rampant inflation in Brazil. The other is that earnings in advanced countries are much more valuable, that is, the strong yen brought them more value than currency from Brazil. Further, Japan itself had many reasons to take them as workers. One is that Japan was on a wave of prosperity at that time. Japan needed to expand production of the manufacturing industry; however, at the time, Japanese people started to avoid any jobs regarded as falling under the umbrella of the 3Ks: *kitsui* (hard), *kitanai* (dirty), and *kiken* (dangerous). Working at a factory is regarded as a 3K jobs. Moreover, employing foreign workers met the needs of the *kanban-housiki* (just-in-time system). The just-in-time system works by allowing companies to bring in the necessary amount of stock just when it is needed. Therefore, employers needed more temporary workers to run the system.

However, the manufacturing industry and other business have been badly depressed in Japan for three years or more. Foreign workers then lost their jobs and the money to support their families. After working as *dekasegi* for a while, some of them actually settled down in Japan, but now they are unemployed and are struggling to find jobs or go back their home country. This, of course, influences their children and their education.

2.1.2 Brazilian children and their educational issues

Language seems consistently to be one of the greatest concerns when we consider education for children of foreign residents. In this section, language and cultural issues related to schools for Brazilian children and pupils will be presented in relation to their parents’ problems.

Figure 1 presents current data showing the number of foreign pupils and students needing to study Japanese as a second language (hereafter, JSL) who enrolled in Japanese public schools in October 2008 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2009). It is notable that 40% of the 28,575 are from *Nikkei* Brazilian families that form the largest ethnic group, and are native Portuguese speakers. The second largest group consists of Chinese speakers, who make up 20% of JSL pupils and students. However, Chinese speakers have an advantage in learning the Japanese language, which is that a great number of Chinese characters are used in writing and reading Japanese. The higher the grade the children are in, the more Chinese characters they are required to study. The third group comprises Spanish speakers from South America. Their parents are also *Nikkei* people, who came to Japan for *dekasegi*.

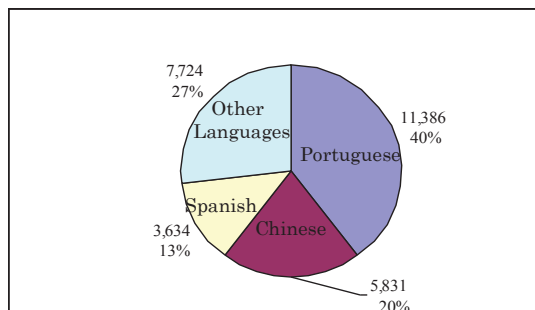


Figure 1. The number of foreign pupils and students of Japanese as a second language in 2008. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

Brazilian children are afflicted with problems in various aspects of their schooling. As every immigrant child suffers, Brazilian children do not have much enthusiasm or motivation to go to school in Japan. They come to Japan just because their parents decided to work in Japan. Thus, from the beginning, it is often the case that they do not have a good start with schools. First of all, JSL cannot be avoided.

As is often argued when it comes to bilingualism, interpersonal communication skills (hereafter, BICS) and cognitive and academic language proficiency (hereafter, CALP) (Cummins 1971) are key perspectives to pay attention to. BICS means that communication skills pertaining to the use of basic daily expressions, such as communicating with friends, giving directions, and buying something at shops are naturally, and within a rather short duration, acquired by the children. On the other hand, CALP is competence to comprehend the abstract contents of school subjects and to express oneself in a logical manner, using academic terms appropriately. It is strongly influenced by factors such as when the students came to Japan; whether they arrived here with any CALP in Portuguese, their first language; and whether they are motivated to progress to higher education, to develop CALP in the Japanese language. If non-native Japanese students cannot possess CALP to a great extent, they will not find the enthusiasm or interest to study at school.

Schools often provide JSL classes to Brazilian pupils and students who need to improve their language skills, including other JSL children, before studying in mainstream classes with Japanese pupils and students. The students study JSL or prepare and review subjects in the classroom, which is usually a separate JSL class, not a mainstream class. In a JSL class, Brazilian children rely on bilingual teachers, who are usually employed as part-time teachers in the Japanese school system, and sometimes JSL teachers, who are primary school teachers and junior high school teachers of particular subjects with no qualifications and little experience to teach JSL; often they teach JSL for a limited time, maybe one or two years. There are, in fact, some problems with the latter type of teachers. Although some seem extremely keen on JSL, others are not so enthusiastic, as they feel that JSL represents an inferior position, as JSL is not their actual profession, which might result in them being looked down upon by class teachers. With the low-motivated and/or little-experienced JSL teachers, it is hard to expect excellent education outcomes. Moreover, most Brazilian pupils and students who have BICS well enough are sent back to mainstream classes. Most schools provide JSL classes for those who have not acquired BICS, but not after that. Once they become considerably fluent Japanese speakers, teachers and schools mistakenly believe that they can, somehow, manage to study with Japanese pupils and students, but in fact, this is where their real struggle in school begins. CALP, being much more important for the children's education and success in schooling, should be a serious concern. This unfortunate situation may be because there is a lack of JSL specialists to support students' development of CALP, schoolteacher training, and appropriate JSL assessments for children, as well as a lack of funding.

According to Watanabe's research, carried out from 2000 to 2002 through action research in a primary school, and in 2005 through interviews with schoolteachers at four primary and two junior high schools with a great number of foreign pupils and students, problems have arisen because of a lack of CALP development support.

In the action research, three female *Nikkei* Brazilian pupils were observed. One of them did not receive any obvious bullying. However, she was ignored by classmates without intention. At the beginning, when she started to come to school, the class teacher asked two girls who seemed very active and smart to look after the Brazilian girl. This seemed to go well at the start. However, after one month, she just sat alone before school started and during break time without a word. The Brazilian girl could not have friends there, and the two Japanese girls became tired of looking after her. She was alone and unintentionally ignored by her classmates, apart from class activities. She had worked to learn JSL and school subjects, in particular math, and she proved her high achievement, but within a year, her parents decided to send her back to her grandmother in Brazil. This case was affected in a complicated way by various factors: limited JSL and social skills, implicit and unintentional bullying, and parent's future planning.

The other case is about being deprived of educational opportunity by parents. Another 11-year-old Brazilian pupil at a primary school, had serious learning difficulties, and the school could not assess whether her problem was from CALP development or from low intelligence quotient. She, however, had lived in Japan since she was five years old and spoke very fluent Japanese, but her Japanese made her seem much younger than her actual age. Although the school provided her with JSL classes for math to

obtain basic counting skills in Japanese, she made little academic progress. Her parents decided not to send her to junior high school, which is compulsory education for Japanese children, against the vice principal and class teachers' persuasion to give her more educational opportunity. The parents believed that there was no reason for her to go to junior high school since she could not understand anything at school. Therefore, after graduating primary school, she worked for her mother to help with housework at home, and lost future opportunities. In fact, this case brought up two main educational issues. One is the parental attitude toward Japanese education, or children's education in general, against which schools and teachers have no authority to intervene. The other is the necessity of special schools and specialists in special educational needs to support children who have a bilingual and multicultural background.

In addition to JSL and education issues for Brazilian children, there are also some cultural identity issues found. For example, Brazilian children are sometimes not comfortable showing their cultural identity to Japanese friends. They seem to want to behave or even to be Japanese. This attitude of Brazilian children attitude towards Brazilian culture, that is, their parent's culture, means that they are losing their motivation for learning Portuguese and their contact with the language. As a result, they then cannot communicate with their own parents and lose future possibilities when they go back to Brazil.

Furthermore, currently, non-schooled Brazilian children are a serious concern. There are indeed two types of non-schooled children. One is those children who used to attend a Japanese public school, but at some point, this ended. They could not adapt themselves into the school or their parents did not see how important it was for their children to go to a Japanese public school. As Ota and Tsuboya (2005) indicate, a large number of children do not go to school and spend their time either playing games or watching TV, or may even be teenagers employed in the manufacturing industry. The second type of non-schooled children is those who were studying at Brazilian schools, but these schools closed or the parents of the children became unemployed due to the current Japanese economic downturn and therefore were unable to pay the school fees, which are said to be between 30,000 and 40,000 yen or more. According to Yuki, M. (2009), there were 90 Brazilian schools in December 2008, but this had decreased to 86 by February 2009. The number of children attending Brazilian schools has, in general, therefore, been rapidly decreasing from a total of 6,737 down to 3,811. An estimated 722 Brazilian children who gave up or lost their schools actually returned home to Brazil, although 160 children began to attend Japanese public schools (a very low number). Now, many Brazilian children who gave up or lost their Brazilian schools, together with their parents, are waiting at home for the opportunity to return to a Brazilian school when their parents eventually manage to find employment again.

It is recognized that there are many problems related to Brazilian children now. How can Japan afford assistance to overcome them? In section 4, education policy for Brazilian pupils and students will be examined to determine if the policies are beneficial for them.

3. Education policy for children of foreign residents

In this section, current Japanese government policy for foreign residents is outlined, as is Brazilian government support for Brazilian residents in Japan.

As a system to realize a multicultural symbiotic society, government, prefectures, municipal assemblies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and not-for-profit organizations (NPOs) support foreign residents, as seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2. System to create a multicultural symbiotic society in Japan

Basically, governments set up policies and guidelines for foreign residents, prefectures deal with general problems related to them and get data and information, municipal assemblies support and help them directly, such as in their living situations, education, and medical treatment, and when necessary with local international associations. Local international associations are affiliated organizations of prefectures or municipalities. They practice pilot studies to realize a multicultural symbiotic society, in particular through cultural exchange activities and Japanese language classes. Then NGOs, NPOs and lot of voluntary groups support foreign residents by teaching them the Japanese language and culture, their first languages, and school subjects in their first languages, and giving them school supplies like specific school bags, dictionaries, musical instruments, and school uniforms.

Actually, it took quite a long time for the government set up any education policy for children of foreign residents; NGOs, NPOs, schools, and municipal assemblies had to deal with various problems for them and promote Japanese community cohesion for more than 20 years. Nonetheless, in order to respond to the problems of foreign residents, in particular those related to the serious economy challenges in Japan, the government set up a team for policies for foreign residents under the Cabinet Office on

the 9 January 2010. This is the first government movement to tackle foreign residents' problems officially. Then, let us examine the government's education policy for foreign children.

3.1 *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology: Education policy for foreign residents*

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereafter, MEXT) realized that one of the problems needing to be dealt with urgently is Japanese language education for newcomers, especially Japanese-blood children from South America. They then thrashed out an education policy for children of foreign residents. MEXT (on 19 May 2010), set out fundamental policies after the colloquium for education policy for children of foreign residents that took place in December 2009, shown below.

3.1.1 *National education policy for children of foreign residents*

MEXT set the following education policy for foreign children:

Education systems, as well as enriching the quality of Japanese language education for those children whose first languages are not Japanese, should be considered to make elementary and junior high schools more accessible. Also, we promote private national schools being authorized by local authorities.

MEXT predicts a high possibility that Brazilian children will stay in Japan longer than expected or will settle down in Japan. Therefore, looking at Japanese current education policy for children of foreign residents, it is necessary to better support *Nikkei* Brazilian children. This is because on the basis of the documents on education policy, the term 'children of foreign residents' is used, but often they are identified as Brazilian.

3.1.2 *Towards public schools more accessible for foreign residents' children*

What does 'public schools accessible for foreign residents' children' mean? This question apparently reveals that public schools in Japan have not been accessible for them so far. In fact, public schools have been provided for and concerned with Japanese children only, not foreign children, though some local governments and their boards of education have dealt with them by setting up their own education policies without government education policy.

Now MEXT has a high aim to develop public schools where children of foreign residents can study in comfort. In order to realize the aim, they emphasize three policies:

- First : Improving the system for teaching Japanese as a second language.
- Second: Improving the support system for foreign resident pupils and students to adjust to Japanese school life.
- Third : Enriching the support system and school environment for foreign resident pupils and students to go for further schooling or find employment.

Acclimatizing to Japanese public schools, going for further schooling, and finding work are all dependant on how hard children study and how well they use Japanese. Therefore, MEXT places great emphasis on teaching Japanese as a second language. In particular, MEXT provides a website for schoolteachers and teacher assistants to share information. It is named CLARINET, which stands for Children Living Abroad and Returnees Internet.

3.1.3 *Attempts at better education for Brazilian pupils and students*

There have been several attempts at improving the current problematic situation of Brazilian pupils and students in public schools. Three of them will be illustrated here. One is the programme of educational support for *Nikkei* Brazilian pupils in Brazil, which aims to introduce more bilingual schoolteachers into public schools. The second is teacher-training programmes at Japanese universities. The third is a new teacher-training correspondence course for Brazilian education in Japan. These will be addressed below.

3.1.4 *The Overseas Dispatch Programme: Educational support for Nikkei Brazilian pupils in Brazil*

Due to the increasing number of Brazilian residents in Japan and the accompanying language and social problems, MEXT is concerned with educational issues to be solved for their children in school settings. Particularly, there are more Brazilian pupils and students who cannot adapt the Japanese school system, and then become underachievers and/or non-schooled, which Japanese schools and teachers find difficult to tackle. Therefore, MEXT, with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has included in-service schoolteachers in the programme 'Educational support for *Nikkei* Brazilian pupils'. The programme now sends Japanese primary schoolteachers to Brazil, starting in 2008, the 100th anniversary year of immigration to Brazil from Japan. The selected teachers were sent only to Brazil in 2009 and to five countries in South America in 2010.

These teachers have four missions in Brazil. One is teaching cultivation of aesthetic sensibility through and crafts, music, and physical education. The second is teaching the Japanese language and culture to children. The third is leaning the educational system—how and what they teach *Nikkei* Brazilian pupils, what Brazilian pupils like, and how teachers work with parents—as

well as the Portuguese language and Brazilian culture. They then expect to be bilingual teachers to support *Nikkei* pupils and their parents.

Nevertheless, is it enough to send about 10 primary schoolteachers to Brazil every year through the programme? Is staying there for one year and eight months too long or short a time for them to acquire knowledge of the education system and Portuguese? If they are expected to be educational coordinators or advisors for the local educational authorities, it seems sufficient. However, the programme expects them to be bilingual teachers. If this is really the goal, we should set up multiple strategies for improving schools for Brazilian pupils and students. In addition to that, it should be discussed whether excluding junior high school teachers from the programme has any merit. Junior high school students themselves have serious problems as foreign residents and we have responsibilities to find them jobs or send them for further education.

3.1.5 *Rainbow bridge policy (a tentative name)*

MEXT has also introduced the 'rainbow bridge policy' for non-schooled Brazilian children, which provides classes and opportunities to compensate for learning while their parents are still unemployed and until they find work once again. The period allowed for attending school, however, is no more than six months, and it is aimed at improving JSL for children as well as promoting study at Japanese public schools. Moreover, it aims to develop community cohesion, centring on Brazilian children and their education. MEXT has provided 370 million yen for the implementation of this policy for a period of three years. It is now stated that the policy was introduced in 2009 and will continue until 2012.

3.1.6 *Course for Brazilian educators in Japan*

There is too much hassle required for both Brazilian parents and children to encourage parents to send their children to Japanese public schools. Moreover, when they plan to work for several years and then go back to Brazil, they prefer for their children to study Portuguese along with the school curriculum from Brazil. Meeting their needs, there are 86 private Brazilian primary and secondary schools in Japan (MEXT 2010). However, they have been facing difficulties in finding qualified schoolteachers. As a result, only 60–70% of the teachers working in these schools are qualified, and the others are non-qualified. This tells us that they have not been able to keep reasonable standards of education there. Non-qualified teachers have not had any access to get teacher's certificates for Brazilian school education in Japan. They needed return to Brazil and attend university there.

In order to reduce the problem explained above, Tokai University in Kanagawa and the Federal University of Mato Grosso have cooperated to initiate a teacher-training correspondence course that will provide qualifications for 300 students as kindergarten and primary school teachers following the completion of the four-year programme (Tokai University 2010).

This is not a result of Japanese education policy, but a new challenge taken on by the Brazilian government, a Japanese private company, and a private university to address educational issues of Brazilian children in Japan. Therefore, this course is supported by the Brazilian government, which has provided funds amounting to 400 million yen, and a private company, Mitui & Co., Ltd., with a contribution of 15 million yen, and includes much assistance from the professors and staff at Tokai University. More than 280 students out of the 300 are Brazilian, but native Spanish and Japanese students with a high proficiency in Portuguese were also successful in passing the examination in 2009.

As Watanabe (2010) states, this will give Brazilian people living in Japan more positive visions of the future as better education is provided for their children. However, as I explained, there are many unemployed newcomers because of a depression in the Japanese economy. It is questionable for them whether it is worth staying in. It is also questionable whether this affects Brazilian schools in some way, and if the 300 qualified teachers will enough teaching positions available to them. Moreover, as the course lasts for four years, it is uncertain how many students will stay with the course to eventually attain the appropriate teaching qualification. In addition to that, the course is for only 300 students in 2009, with no further intake planned.

4. Conclusion

Children of foreign residents have the right to study at public schools in Japan. However, it is not legally obligatory like it is for Japanese children. Therefore, any guidelines and teaching strategies are included in the national school curriculum and the course of study. Generally, teacher-training programmes do not need to provide coverage of the current educational issues relating to children of foreign residents in the curriculum. However, many universities nowadays provide optional courses for education for children of foreign residents. For example, there are classes in teaching JSL and internships for teaching in a multicultural symbiotic society at Gunma university, which focuses on Brazilian children more than children from other ethnic minorities. Further, Tokyo Gakugei University provide special teaching Japanese as a second/foreign language course in the primary school teacher-training course. In order to provide better education for Brazilians as well as other foreign children, teaching qualifications for JSL should be established. This will build up the professionalism for bilingual teachers working part-time, and increase their motivation.

In conclusion, I would like to issue a warning that Japanese education policy and schools have very narrow vision of Brazilian pupils' and students' problems. Development of educational policy and improving school settings dealing with Brazilian pupils and students and concentrating on providing JSL learning opportunities (which, of course, is one of the crucial factors to make them successful in learning in Japan) at the same time exclude them from Japanese public schools. When they study JSL in a separate class, they lose the opportunity to have contact with the Japanese language that Japanese pupils and students use, to communicate with them, and to study school subjects in the mainstream curriculum. Moreover, we must not mix the individual

issues of Brazilian children too much. We must always be aware of such factors as their family background, social class, age, gender, and special educational needs. Then we can consider how to include Brazilian pupils and students in public schools. As Banks points out (2009 p.26), ‘viewing the school as a social system can help educators to derive an idea of school reform that can help all students to increase their academic achievement and to develop democratic attitudes and values’. Ultimately, if schoolteachers are trained and change their teaching and cognition of multicultural classes, then Japanese pupils and students will change themselves to adjust to multicultural classes, and then Japanese public schools will become more accessible for Brazilian children as a step toward a multicultural symbiotic society.

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